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ABSTRACT

Using the viewpoint of semiotics, this paper "re-reads" Karl Marx's labor theory of value and suggests a "triple triangle" model for commodity production and shows how this model could be a model for semiosis in general. The paper argues that there are three advantages to considering homogeneity of the sign production and the commodity production: two seemingly different phenomena--culture and economics--could be included in the same general theoretical framework; human communication could be understood as a necessary condition for the commodity production; and the hypothesis that communication action could produce value offers a clue for rethinking of the classical labor theory. After an introductory section, the paper presents a brief overview of commodity as a sign. The "Toward a Commodity Production Model" section of the paper discusses: (1) what a commodity is; (2) the necessary conditions for exchange; (3) two elements of value production; (4) communication labor as productive labor; (5) the role of the consumer; (6) consumption as interpretation; and (7) the triple triangle model for commodity production. The "Toward a sign production model" section of the paper discusses: from commodity production to sign production; semiosis as a triadic relation; and the three stages of the semiosis and the triple triangle model. A figure illustrating the triple triangle model for commodity production and a figure illustrating the triple triangle model for sign production are included; 11 notes are included. Contains 43 references. (RS)

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From Commodity Production to Sign Production:

A Triple Triangle Model for Marx's Semiotics and Peirce's Economics

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ABSTRACT

A commodity is a sign. This is why the production process of commodity and that of sign have the homogeneous structure: Both are produced from Nature; both are produced by human body; both are produced for others; both are to be exchanged; most of all, both consist of the three stages of the triadic relations of which elements are the same: material objects, human actions, and their products. This paper clearly represents the homogeneous triple-triadic relationships with the triple triangle models. On the basis of the homogeneous structure of sign and commodity, this paper argues:

(1) "Communication labor" is necessary and productive labor for commodity (value) production. (2) As a communication labor, advertising produces value. (3) Every commodity has two aspects: material and meaning. The one is produced by blue collars through material labor in factories; the other is produced by white collars through communication labor in offices. (4) Every commodity, whether it is information, cultural product or typical (economic) good, has two aspects: material and meaning. Meaning is in the material (for example, car, flag, book, Coke), and at the same time, every material has meaning. In this sense, everything is a sign. (5) Therefore, we could and should deal with all kinds of cultural products as well as commodities with the same theoretical perspective of triple triadic relations. (6) Cultural studies must start from analysis of commodities and cultural products, or signs; neither from ideologies, nor from hegemony, nor from power structures. (7) This perspective implies: Every reality--whether it is social, cultural, or economic--is semiotically constructed through human actions, or the labor of semiosis. We may call it "semiotic construction of reality."

From Commodity Production to Sign Production:

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Introduction

We live in the world of commodities. Just look around yourself. How many things can you point out that are not commodities? In our capitalist society, everything *is* a commodity, and, as I will argue, commodity is a real sign. In this sense, when Saussure exemplified some "systems of signs" in his widely cited embryonic paragraph for the science of signs[1], he omitted the most important sign phenomenon other than language: commodity.

Why, then, *could* we consider a commodity as a sign? Why is it "possible to consider the exchange of commodities as a semiotic phenomenon" (Eco,1976a:24)? Or, what are the reasons justifying our perspectives that regard the sign production and the commodity production as a homogeneous process? First of all, both the sign and the commodity are produced in the relationship of human actions and materials. A commodity is a commodity only in the commodity relations, and there is no sign without the semiotic relations.

Second, both are the products "for others." A commodity which is an "use-value for others" (Marx,1977a:48), is produced for others' consumption, just as a sign for others' interpretation (Eco,1976a:151-8). Both must be shared (in case of public goods and sign systems) and exchanged (in case of commodities and individual signs).

Third, both have the same character in a sense that both are combinations of material and meaning. A commodity is a combination of the material properties and the social meaning. Its use-value is, therefore, determined not only by the physical characters of the object but, as Marx said, by cultural and historical contexts. A sign

also consists of the material part and the meaning part, and their combination is, too, as Saussure said, "arbitrary" and culturally determined.

Lastly, both consist of "the triadic relation" of which three elements are the same: the material objects, the human actions and the products. This is why we can see so many triangle models in the texts of semiotics, symbolism, philosophy of language, and so on. For example, Eco (1976a:23-5, 59-60), Eco and Sebeok (1983:1-10), Deely (1990:88-90), Gumpel (1984:51-121). In the semiotic relations, (1) the objects are expressed as referent; (2) the human actions as "perceiving," "signifying" and "interpreting"; (3) the products as "percepts," "sign" and "meaning." This means: perceiving produces percepts; signifying produces sign; interpreting produces meaning. Same is true in the commodity relations, (1) the objects are expressed as the productive material; (2) the human actions as "the material labor," "the communication labor" and "consumption"; (3) the products as "products," "commodities" and "utility." This means: material labor produces products; communication labor produces commodities; consumption produces utility.

Why, then, *should* we consider homogeneity of the sign production and the commodity production? What are the merits of this perspective? First, we could have a general theoretical framework with which we may explain seemingly different two phenomena: culture and economics; cultural industries and economic industries. My argument is that cultural products are not just "commoditified." They *are* commodities, from the first, in this capitalist society. Same is true with the typical economic commodities. They are not just "symbolized." They are signs, from the first, in this capitalist society. Therefore, there is no "cultural industries" which produces "hegemonic ideology." If there is such a thing as "hegemony" or "dominant ideology," it would be produced not only by film, books and mass media (cultural industries), but also by car, clothes, food, shampoo, soap, and so on.

Second, the perspective would allow us to understand human communications as a necessary condition for the commodity production (This will be explained in some detail in the later part of this

essay, while I clarify the notion of communication labor). In this sense, human communications (superstructure!) are the "base" of economy.

Third, this perspective will give us a clue with which we could rethink the classical labor theory of value: the hypothesis that communication action could produce value (therefore it is another productive labor) has very important implications for the political economy: the same amount of labor - which is represented as the same working day - could produce diverse magnitudes of value. I think this perspective could provide us with crucial clues for solving the old - but important - problems of political economy[2], and its explanatory power for our capitalist society would be revaluated.

Fourth, it will provide us with a powerful methodological tool for enlightening the real character of human communicational phenomena, such as advertising, and for explaining why capitalist society cannot but develop into the information society as today.

Lastly, the perspective would make it possible to understand semiosis as the process of sign production, consumption and exchange. With this understanding we may find an alternative approach to the basic notions of Peirce ("the three categories," "interpretant") as well as his theory of signs in general, which is filled with enormous amount of triple categorizations.

In this essay, from the viewpoint of semiotics, I will re-read Marx's labor theory of value and suggest "triple triangle model" for commodity production (semiotic interpretation of *Capital*); then, I will show how this "triple triangle model" could be a model for semiosis in general (Marxist interpretation of semiosis). If a commodity is a real sign, the processes of commodity production would be the same as that of sign production. Consequently, if we can construct a general model for commodity production, it would be a "good" example on which we construct a general model for the sign production. Can we arrive the general model for semiosis with only one "good" example? Yes, if we believe, not in induction nor in deduction, but in "abduction" as a reliable and practical way to the scientific discoveries (Eco and Sebeok,1983; Eco,1884:39-43).

Commodity as a sign: A brief overview

There has been much discourse on homogeneity between signs (language, symbols, cultural products) and commodities (economic goods), especially among Marxist cultural theorists. For example, see Smythe(1977), Haug(1986), Negt and Kluge(1983), Garnham(1990), Murdock(1978), etc. But as we see in their main slogan of "commodification of culture (consciousness)," their arguments are based on the fundamental dualism: discrimination between cultural commodities (industries) from non cultural or economic commodities (industries).

They argue we should regard cultural products and information as commodities, but their arguments are at best rhetorical explanation, because they do not believe "cultural products" are produced by the productive labor; none of them have ever tried to explain the cultural commodity production with the labor theory of value. As a result, they themselves deny their own assertions. If information and cultural products are real commodities, they must and can be explained along the same logic of capitalist production in general. Every commodity, whether it comes from "economic" industry or "cultural" industry, is produced by human labor and has two aspects: social meaning and material. We, therefore, should not discriminate the "two different areas of production," and need no "choices between two different theories" (Murdock, 1978:118).

Some of them pay attention to the "symbolic" character of "economic" commodities, but they do not think a commodity as a real sign . On the contrary, they believe a commodity is (should be) a mere thing that has "genuine" use-value based on its material nature. The social meaning or the "sign aspect" of a commodity is, therefore, regarded as "false image" or "false consciousness" added by mass mediated advertisements. For example:

> It (advertising) 'works' because it feeds off a *genuine* 'use-value'; besides needing social meaning we obviously *do need* material goods. (Williamson, 1991;14, her emphasis)

But what is the "genuine" use-value? Does such a thing really exist? If so, what is the genuine use-value of a diamond? A glass cutter? Or something to mean "eternal love"? (Williamson, 1991:12). What is the genuine use-value of a sports car? Is it mere means of the transportation? And how about the "Diet Coke," of which material property is carbonated sweet water? Is it only for quenching thirst? How about the sunglasses? Are they for the strong sunshine? Then, why do so many pop stars wear the "sun"glasses even in the dark? There is no such as genuine nor false use-value. Marx clearly pointed:

> A commodity is...a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring *from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference*. (1977a:43, my emphasis)

Of course we "obviously *do need* material goods." But when we are hungry, what do we need? Some protein or fat? Absolutely not. Rather, we "do need" hamburgers (if Americans), or spaghetti (if Italians), or boshintang (if Koreans). *We do need the material thing that has social meaning: and we do need social meaning that is carried by the material thing. In a word, we do need commodities as signs.*

These two elements of a commodity cannot be divided. Both of them determine "economic" value of a commodity. There is no essential difference between the "economic (material)" value and the "sign" (meaning) value. There is only "one" value that has both. Baudrillard (1981), who paid great attention to the sign aspect of a commodity, also recognized these two elements as the same thing:

> The analysis of the production of signs and of culture thus does not impose itself as exterior, ulterior, and "superstructural" in relation to that of material production (1981:114). In fact, *all these relations form a system in the framework of political economy*... A critique of general political economy (or a critical theory of value) and a theory of symbolic exchange are one and the same thing. (1981:128, his italics)

But it seems to me Baudrillard still confined himself in the dualism, because he differentiated the "sign exchange" from the "economic

exchange," and the "sign value" from the "economic value." According to him, the sign value system is "radically different from the system of production, exchange and social relations based on the economic" (1981:118). Furthermore, he said, "all forms of value (object, commodity or sign) must be negated in order to inaugurate symbolic exchange" (1981:125). Consequently, he is talking about not a commodity but "the sign value" for which we should have another theoretical framewok, just as in the case of Murdock (1978).

Rossi-Landi (1983; 1975) is another great figure who mainly worked on the issue of "semiotic homology for linguistics and economics." One of the main idea of this essay, the notion of communication labor, has greatly been inspired by his discourse on "linguistic capital":

> As we said, a language is an institutionalized assemblage of products of previous linguistic word; .... the language(*langue*) provides us with *materials* and *instruments*, in the technical sense of products of previous work on which and with which we expend new work; .... as a universal means of exchange for any communication, ... the language in all respects constitutes the constant capital of all further linguistic work, that is, of all expression and communication. (Rossi-Landi,1983:46-8, his italics)

But he was a linguist to the back bone. His efforts might be summarized as "application of linguistic framework to the economics." He seldom showed his interests in the other way: explaining linguistics and semiotics from the viewpoint of economics and commodity production. In this sense, his "homology" is one-sided. I will take the other road not taken by Rossi-Landi, but the destination would be the same.

Toward a commodity production model

(1) What is a commodity?

According to Marx, a commodity is "a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants" (1977a:43). But the utility of a thing is not determined by its own properties. Because "every object possesses various properties, and is thus capable of being applied to different

uses" (Marx, 1977a:177). Human beings are able to find various ways of uses in the same thing, and therefore, the utility of a thing is not determined simply by its material character, but by the flexible relationship between human desire and material properties.[3]

And this "utility of a thing" makes it a use-value (Marx, 1977a:44). Therefore, "the use-value of objects belongs to them independently of their material properties" (Marx, 1977a:87). In other words, the use-value of a commodity is not merely a material thing but a cultural figure that is to be determined in the cultural contexts. All commodities are use-values. But use-values are not always commodities. For example, if I produce some product, say rice, only for my own use, then this rice may be a use-value, but can not be a commodity. In order to produce commodities, producer must produce "not only use-values, but *use-values for others*, social use-values" (Marx,1977a:48, my italics). To produce a commodity,therefore, a producer must produce "use-value for others," an object of exchange.

(2) The necessary conditions for exchange

Without exchange a product cannot be a commodity and, of course, it cannot have any value at all. It means if a product is not exchanged, the amount of labor spent for the product cannot be converted into value. "To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use-value, by means of exchange" (Marx,1977a:48). Therefore, only through the exchange a product becomes a commodity, and labor produces value.

What, then, makes people exchange their products? According to Marx, "what makes them (commodities) exchangeable is the *mutual desire* of their owners to alienate them" (1977a:91, parentheses and italics are mine).

Now let's consider the conditions on which people have "mutual desire" for other's products. Assume that one unit of rice is produced by R, a rice producer, and a pair of shoes is produced by S, a shoe producer. For the exchange of these two products, R and S must "mutually" want each other's product. This means that they accept the other's product as their own use-value. Having this "mutual desire," however, R and S must know about each other's products. This knowledge

is the necessary conditions for "mutual desire" and exchange. Let's investigate what this knowledge is.

First of all, R and S must know that the other has produced something that could be her or his own use-value. In other words, they have to recognize the fact that there are other's products that could be their own use-value (recognition of existence of a commodity).

Second, R and S must know how to use the products (understanding the way of consumption of a commodity). R should know how to wear the shoes, say, something good for her or his foot. S also must understand how to cook and eat the rice. If S, a bread eater, cannot understand the way of consumption of rice, hardly could she or he accept R's product as her or his own use-value.

Third, they should believe firmly that the other's product would give them some satisfaction. (assurance of other's products as use-values) Marx says: "Every owner of a commodity wishes to part with it in exchange only for those commodities whose use-value satisfies some want of his" (1977a:89).

Without these pieces of information, nobody could have any desire for others' products. Without such desire, the products can not be exchanged. Without exchange, it cannot have any value. "It is only by being exchanged that the products of labor acquire, as values" (Marx,1977a:78). Therefore, these informational conditions are essential for commodity (value) production. It is not coincidence the basic goals of modern advertising are exactly the same with these informational conditions.

Besides these informational conditions, R should know, *before* the production, that how many units of rice would be desired by S. S also need to know how many pairs of shoes are wanted by R. Without this knowledge (information about consumption/demand power), their labor could be wasted and cannot produce value.

Let's assume that R produced 2 units of rice. But what if S needs only 1 unit of it? Then, the other unit cannot be an object of exchange. If it is not exchangeable, it would have no value. "If the thing is useless, so is the labor contained in it; the labor does not count as labor, and therefore creates no value" (Marx,1977a:48).

Therefore, R's labor cannot be converted into value. It is wasted. Before the production, however, if R had had the information about the quantity of S's desire, R surely would have produced only 1 unit of rice, and she or he may have produced another product: for example clothes, which could be desired by S. Then, all the labor that was spent by R could have produced value. No part of R's labor would be wasted. Now we come to understand that the *informational conditions* even determine whether R's labor would be productive or useless.

Here we have a contradiction. One unit of rice and a pair of shoes are produced. A definite amount of the labor already has been spent. Therefore, the products contain definite quantity of human labor and they should have definite magnitude of value. But as we have seen here, value of the products also depends on some informational conditions. Even in certain conditions, the product cannot have any value at all. How can we accept this contradiction?

(3) Two elements of value production

Let's keep on thinking with our example. One day R produced a new product: wheat. To make this wheat (a product) a commodity, it is not enough only with the fact that R "materially" produced wheat. R must produce S's desire, too. R can produce S's desire for wheat only through wheat production itself: but it does not mean that S's desire is automatically produced by the material production itself. Besides material production of wheat, R must produce the informational conditions. It means a part of R's labor must be spent for the production of the informational conditions. Without it, her or his product cannot be a commodity.

The situation is the same to S. To produce shoes as a commodity, S also has to do two kinds of labor. One is the labor for the material production, say cutting and sewing the leather. The other is the labor for the informational conditions. I call the one *material labor* and the other *communication labor*. Both are necessary labor for any kind of commodity production. Even if R and S seem to exchange their products without the communication labor, we may not say their commodity production was accomplished *without* it. Rather we should

understand that the informational conditions had already been completed *before* the material production.[4]

The informational conditions are necessary for the 'mutual desire,' which appears as 'demand power' in the market. Demand power is distinct from 'demand' which is merely the opposite concept of supply. Demand power is, based on the use-value, constituted of various elements, i.e., amount of supply, purchasing power, etc. And these elements 'react on one another as units, as aggregate forces' (Marx,1977b:193). Therefore, the communication labor produces demand power by producing the informational conditions.

Now it is clear that our contradiction is not 'contradiction' any more. Value of a commodity is determined by the two kinds of labor: one is material labor which produces material products, and the other is communication labor which produces demand power. Both are necessary for any kind of commodity production, because a commodity, which is a sign, has two aspects: material and meaning. With regard to this point, I think, it is very useful to compare value to weight as Marx did (1977a:62-3).

The weight of a thing is also determined by the two factors. One is its mass and the other is gravity which is acting on the mass. We can compare mass to the amount of labor materialized in a commodity, and gravity to the demand power. Weight does not lie in mass nor in gravity. It lies in the relation between mass and gravity. Just like this, the value of a commodity is determined in the relation between the contained labor in a commodity (mass) and the demand power (gravity) for a commodity.

Without change of mass, weight of a thing could be diverse according to gravity, for example, whether on the earth or on the moon. In the same way, without change of the quantity of contained labor, value of a commodity could be diverse by change of the demand power. If the necessary information of a product is not known by any people, no one could desire this product as use-value. Then, the demand power for this product will be zero. Just as there is no weight without gravity regardless of its mass, so there is no value without demand power regardless of its contained labor.

According to the two aspects of value production, the process of value production is also divided into the two parts. One is the process of the material production which is carried out by the blue-collar in the factories, and the other is that of the demand power production carried out by the white-collar in the offices.

(4) Communication labor as productive labor

Let's think about the nature of communication labor with our example. To produce wheat (a new commodity), R herself or himself must have found use-value in wheat: R may have spent some of her or his labor-time for, say, R & D for the "new product." Moreover, R has to make S accept this new product as S's own use-value. R should think about possibility whether she or he can produce S's desire by means of market analysis, and must have some confidence for producing the demand power for the new product. Otherwise, she or he would not have produced it. Galbraith (1986:181) gives us good example:

> "Bristol-Myers does not, in general, develop products in its labs and then determine how they might be marketed. It ordinarily begins with extensive consumer testing and other market research, proceeds from there to develop some concept of a marketing opportunity, including even some notions about advertising campaigns; and only then does it turn to the labs for products that might meet these specifications."
>
> (Fortune, February 1967)

Demand-producing labor is usually represented as R & D and marketing, which include collecting various information, designing, bargaining, making contract, market analysis, advertising and so on. In short, these are various kinds of communication actions: this is why I call it *communication labor*.

Some may ask: if communication labor is productive, does the more communication labor produce the more value? The answer is: Yes. The more communication labor produces the more demand power, and therefore, the more value. Let's return to our example.

At first, in order to produce S's desire, R must have met S and talked about her or his own product. If it takes 1 hour for R to make

S recognize existence of R's product, it will take more than 1 hour to make S understand and assure the utility of the product. Further, if R meets the more people, say S1, S2, S3..., she or he could produce the more demand power. Of course, it would take much more time. Probably R will try to divide her or his total labor-time into material labor and communication labor with the ratio on which she or he could produce the maximum amount of value. How can this ratio be determined? This might be one of the main subjects in the study of communication labor.

Later, R will try to find the more efficient means of communication, i.e., means of the demand power production, just as she or he wants the more efficient means of the material production. She or he produces better tools , for example letter system and press, just as she or he invents a spade and a farm tractor. "Even in the field of non-linguistic labor, instruments are in continual evolution." (Rossi-landi, 1983:47) Today, the most developed communication systems (various sign systems and mass-media) are possessed by the whole society, and constitute the essential parts of the culture of the society, and also undertake the role of social indirect capital (public goods) just like in the case of freeway, railroad, airport, etc.[5] They serve as the communication constant capital in the process of commodity production.

One of the brilliant example of the communication labor is, of course, advertising. Thus, advertising is another productive labor. But there are prevailing misunderstandings about advertising. For example, Smythe (1977:3) said:

> I submit that the materialist answer to the question - What is the commodity form of mass -- produced, advertiser-supported communications under monopoly capitalism? -- is audiences and readerships.

In short, he asserted that advertising produces "audiences" as a commodity and mass media sell it to the advertisers.[6] But I don't understand in what sense his answer is of "materialist." Only a commodity can be produced and sold in a capitalist society. Audiences

cannot be a commodity nor commodity form. Likewise, 'audiences' time' is not something to be sold:

> Of the off-the job work time, the largest single block is time of the audiences which is sold to advertisers (Smythe, 1977:3).

It seems to be plausible. But we never buy nor sell time. Time itself, or audiences' time or whatever, has no value, no use-value, no exchange-value. Time is not a commodity. Time is only the 'measure of the quantities of the labor,' that is the 'labor-time' (Marx, 1985b:31). Therefore, time has nothing to do with values where there is no productive labor. But some people keep on following Smythe's wrong way:

> What advertisers buy with their advertising dollars is audiences watching time, which is all the media have to sell....When media 'sell time' to a sponsor, it is not abstract time that is being sold but the time of particular audiences. (Jhally and Livant, 1986:130)

However, 'watching time' is not a labor-time because 'watching advertising' is not a productive labor. Only the communication labor producing the advertising material is the productive labor: for example, the labor of market researcher, copy-writer, A.E., designer, printer, cameraman, art director and etc. They consist of the communication variable capital (CV). They are productive labor and also produce surplus-value. Therefore, it is false to say: 'the labor time spent in advertising the commodities does not create any surplus value' (Arriaga, 1984:59).

Mass media and other communication systems consist of the communication constant capital (CC). (But the labors of the workers who are engaged in the media systems should be counted as CV.) Therefore, 'what advertisers buy with their advertising dollars' is not 'audiences watching time,' but the communication constant capital; more correctly, they pay 'advertising dollars' for the charge of using the communication system, or CC, for producing the demand power. Consequently, the value of CC, which is expressed as 'advertising dollars,' is transferred into the advertised commodity, and consists

of a part of the value of that commodity. Smythe "discovered" the important fact that advertising produces *something*. But he did not realize what is really produced by advertising. He failed in penetrating "the core understanding of the role of media in advanced capitalism." (Jhally and Livant, 1986:128)

Nevertheless, Jhally and Livant (1986) kept on going Smythe's way. It seems to me they have gone too far, even gone astray. According to them, "watching as working" is a "real economic process" (1986:125) and "watching" TV is "a form of labor" (1986:133). And "audiences," a commodity, produces values merely by watching the commercials. "Their 'wages' are the programs, without which they would not watch TV" (Jhally, 1982:208).[7] Therefore, the longer advertising time produces absolute surplus-value. If it is impossible, "the networks" can make "the time of watching advertising more intense - they can make the audiences watch harder" (Jhally and Livant, 1986:133).

What happened? Do I become a commodity by watching TV? And do I (a commodity!) create values only by watching TV? Then, I am a laborer, I am a commodity and my labor is embodied in my consciousness. After all these assertions, they still call themselves "materialist" (Jhally and Livant, 1986:124). Livant was right when he said that "the field of communications is a jungle of idealism" (in Smythe, 1977:3).

I think it is wise to use a metaphor to criticize a metaphor. We can get water only by opening the water faucet. Then, the act of "opening the faucet" is the labor that produces water? And we can get "surplus-water" by opening the water faucet "for a long time" or "intensively"? One more: we can turn on electric lights just by touching the switch with fingers. But nobody can say that "touching the switch" produces the electric light that illuminates the room. The electric light can be produced only by the labor that constructs the electronic facilities, and makes the electric bulbs and wires. "Watching TV" is no more productive labor than "opening the faucet" and "touching the switch." Value is produced only by the productive labor, or communication labor that constructs and operates media system and produces advertising materials.

Why they had to go astray? Because their basic assumptions about advertising are wrong. As a communication labor, advertising is the essential and indispensable for the commodity production. The nature of advertising is not something to "speed up the selling of commodities" (Jhally and Livant, 1986:125). Advertising is not a problem of selling but of production. Therefore, it is not "a cost of circulation" (Arriaga, 1984:57), but a cost of production. It is not "capital functioning in the sphere of circulation" (Arriaga,, 1984:59), but in that of production.

(5) The role of the consumer: consumption as interpretation

The process of commodity production is completed only through consumption: "The product only obtains its 'last finish' in consumption" (Marx,1973:91). Consumption is not merely determined by the material properties. It is twofold: subjective and objective. As we can find various utilities in a thing, so we may consume a commodity in a various way. For example:

> A bottle of vintage port may enjoy a prestige and exclusivity which means that it is never actually consumed (opened and drunk), although it may be consumed symbolically (gazed at, dreamed about, talked about, photographed, and handled) in various ways which produce a great deal of satisfaction. (Featherstone, 1991:16)

Like this, the consumption of a commodity is determined not only by the material properties of an object but also by "the way of consumption." And "the way of consumption" is produced by the production process itself (especially by communication labor) itself. Marx (1973:92) writes:

> Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption.

Here, (2) and (3) imply that the utility of a commodity is, as the meaning of a sign, determined in the intersubjective relation between producer and consumer. Just as a text producer (the author) "has to rely upon a series of codes" (Eco,1979:7), a commodity producer must furnish "a series of codes" or "manner of consumption" with which consumers interpret the utility of commodities. And as "the author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (Model Reader)" (Eco,1979:7), the commodity producer must anticipate a model for the possible consumer (We may call it Model Consumer): And this is the main function of marketing of which nature is communication labor. Let's find an example from Williams' writing :

> If we were sensibly materialist, in the part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of an insane irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young at heart, or neighborly. A washing machine would be useful machine to wash clothes, rather than an indication that we are forward-looking or an object of envy to our neighbors (Williams,1980:185).

It is not difficult to imagine the situation of here. By help of advertising, the new "manner of consumption" or new "series code" for consumption of beer has been presented. Now the advertised beer has acquired the "additional" utility as means of showing "ourselves to be manly, young at heart or neighborly." And Williams regards this created use-value as "insane irrelevance." But as we have seen, the "true need" and the "genuine" use-value does not exist. (The same is true of texts: there is no "one true meaning" of a text.) The assumption of "the material" = "the true (genuine)" = "the economic" is a fixed dualism. If the advertising, which made the beer as the means of "showing manly," was really "irrelevant and insane," the advertising could not have succeeded in providing a "series of codes" for interpretation of the beer, and it would have failed in creating the new utility. Every product has various properties, and we can find various use-value in the same thing. Marx says that, "to discover the

various uses of things is the work of history" (1977a:43). I would like to add this: "and also the work of advertising."[8]

Producing a new meaning and utility implies that human wants (needs) of the commodity are also newly produced. As Marx said, "no production without a need. But consumption reproduces the need: Production not only supplies a material for the need, but it also supplies a need for the material" (1973:92). Using the "series of codes," consumers produce and satisfy their wants by interpreting the meaning and utility of the commodity. It is possible because "our wants and pleasures have their origin in society: Since they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature" (Marx,1985a:33). For example:

> Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth. (Marx,1973:92)

In order to provide the "new wants" for the beer consumer, the manufacturer (producer) should have the information about the beer market and everything else: Who drinks beer, when, and why? What kind of beer could be preferred most? In short, she or he needs to know about the "Model Consumer" of the beer. Therefore, before the material production, the beer must have been projected and designed as something that has "some" meaning that is to be interpreted by the consumer. For this, everything related to the beer production (For example, alcoholicity of the beer, design of the bottle and package, name and total image, positioning in the beer market, etc.) should be decided for the single purpose: creating new "meaning." And then, the advertising is also to be designed and produced for the same purpose: providing new "series of codes." All of these processes are accomplished by the communication labor. We can imagine the same thing with the "washing machine" and other commodities that consist of our everyday life.

Without communication labor, the producer could not provide the new "series of codes" and, therefore, could not create the new "meaning." Without the new meaning, beer will be just beer forever. And every beer will be accepted as the same commodities regardless of its

producers, and consumed by the same people in the same way. Consequently, without communication labor, "the reproduction of capital on a progressively increasing scale" (Marx, 1977a:545) and monopoly capitalism would be impossible. The advertising supported by mass media produced monopoly capitalism; not vice versa. [9]

Furthermore, "new items" and "new models," which are the necessary condition for the capitalism, could not be produced, because without "demand power production," as we have already seen, "new items" cannot be a "use-value for others." Every commodity was once new when they appeared at the market for the first time. Only into American supermarkets, "over 6,000 new items are introduced every year" (Bogart, 1986:42). Were it not for the communication labor, these "new items" could not be produced. The capitalists would not dare to change the models or to produce the new items without the conviction of the power of the modern advertising. Thus, advertising even makes it possible to produce the commodities that could not be produced without it. Advertising exists before the commodity itself ontologically, logically and even historically. Berman (1982:61) said, "We often think of advertising as if it were a modern invention, but it is nearly as old as history itself."

(6) The triple triangle model for commodity production

Now we come to understand that the process of commodity production consists of three stages, and each stage also has triadic relation. In the first stage, material labor produces product with material; product is not to be exchanged yet. In the second stage, communication labor produces commodity with product; here, product becomes use-value for others, which is exchangeable. In the third stage, consumption produces meaning of the commodity or utility with commodity. This process might be depicted as in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The triple triange model for commodity production

This model represents a molecular structure of the commodity production system of which elements are the triadic atomic structure.

The actual commodity production processes would consist of a number of these "molecules." And the processes would start from the last stage, just as sign (text) production begins with "foreseeing" (Eco,1979:7; 1976a:151-2) the interpreter's way of interpretation .

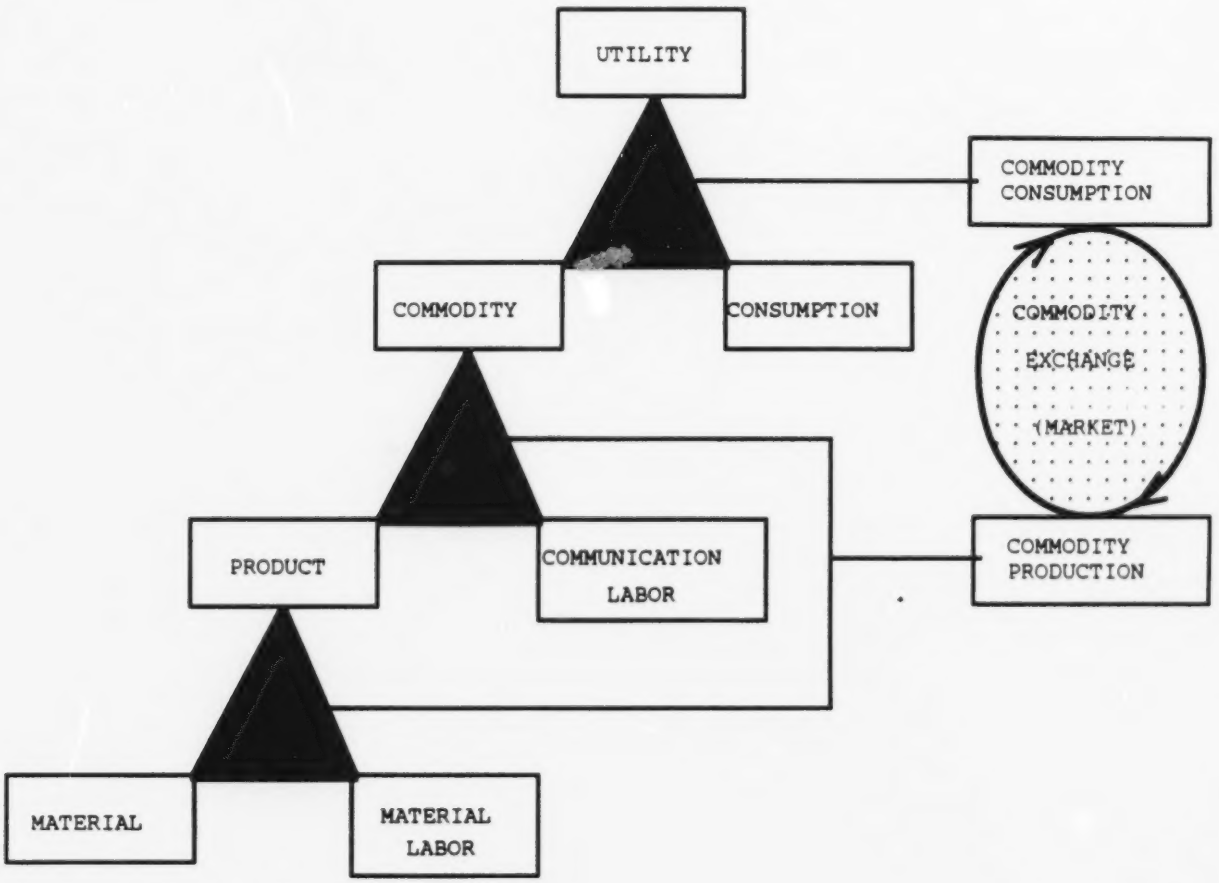

Figure 1: THE TRIPLE TRIANGE MODEL FOR COMMODITY PRODUCTION

Toward a sign production model

(1) From commodity production to sign production

Now let us think about the process of sign production. Just as all commodities have certan material properties, every sign needs material foundation. For writing letters, we need ink and paper. For speaking language, we have to vibrate the air. We, first of all, "must accomplish a task purely in terms of physical stress" (Eco, 1976a:151). As commodity production starts with the material labor that acts on productive materials, sign production begins, too, with the human action acting on material or external objects. This action is perception or "perceiving." (I prefer to use "perceiving" rather than "perception," for the one seems to me more suitable to express human action in processing than the other.) By "perceiving" I mean two different "accomplishments" which are closely related. On one hand, it means producing the object of perceiving: On the other hand, it means perceiving the objects that was produced by (either my own or others') labor. However, the one is impossible without the other, because producing the object of others' perception presupposes my own perception of the object as a necessary condition.

There are fundamental common things between the material labor and perceiving: Both are the first relation that human beings construct with the Nature, and both are the human actions based on the "body." Perceiving is "neither sensation or intellection but lived-experience that is present with the act of experiencing" (Lanigan,1991:103). It is the "bodily experience" on which every meaning is based. According to Merleau-Ponty, "the total meaning" and "the relationships of meaning result precisely from our own organization." Johnson also argues that every meaning is fundamentally originated from our "bodily experience" or "preconceptual structures of experience." He provides us with detailed description of the "bodily experience":

> We begin to grasp the meaning of physical force from the day we are born (or even before). We have bodies that are acted upon by "external" and "internal" forces such as gravity, light, heat, wind, bodily processes, and the obtrusion of other physical

> objects. Such interactions constitute our first encounters with forces, and they reveal patterned recurring relations between ourselves and our environment. Such patterns develop as meaning structures through which our world begins to exhibit a measure of coherence, regularity, and intelligibility (Johnson, 1987:13).

Perceiving produces "percepts." The percept is my own experience that other people can hardly understand directly. In other words, "the perception of the world by the others cannot enter into competition with my own perception of it, for my position is not comparable to theirs" (Merleau-Ponty in Lanigan, 1991:122)[10]. Thus the percept itself cannot be shared with others and, therefore, is not exchangeable. But it has potential exchangeability, because:

> Each perception is mutable and only probable -- it ... is the belongness of each experience to the same world, their equal power to manifest it, as *possibilities of the same world.* (Merleau-Ponty in Lanigan, 1991:125)

This implies that the percept is not merely a product of biological organization but also that of culture. It is produced neither by mechanical flesh nor by subjective mind. It is a product of "body," which is "neither subject or object but subject-object" (Lanigan,1991:126-8). As Berger and Luckmann (1967:49) clearly explicated, "there is no human nature in the sense of a biologically fixed substratum determining the variability of socio-cultural formations." Therefore, the percept is determined by biological and cultural conditions (See also Eco,1985)[11], just as an economic product is determined by both material condition (nature) and cultural condition (productive forces or technology).

Like in the case of commodity production, "the percept" should be reproduced as something exchangeable: It must be a "percept for others" or a "social percept." Therefore, we need another human action that produces a sign from a percept: signifying. Just as communication labor produces commodities with products, "signifying" produces signs from percepts. Only by signifying, our rather unique and "eccentric" percepts can be objectified, because "obectivation is signification, that is, the human production of signs" (Berger and Luckmann,

1967:35). Therefore, a sign is "objectivation" of my own percepts. Peirce also said a sign "denotes by describing what you are to do in order to gain a perceptual acquaintance with the object of the world" (Peirce in Eco, 1976b:1463).

In short, signifying is reproducing my own percepts as something understandable to someone else. A metaphor is the best example of signifying, just as advertising is for communication labor. (It is not just coincident that most of advertisements are filled with metaphors). According to Johnson, a metaphor is "a process by which we understand and structure one domain of experience in terms of another domain of a different kind" (1987:15). Thus to understand a new thing, and to exchange one's own percepts, we need a metaphor. If my own metaphor is accepted by others, my own percepts become "percept for others" or "social percepts." To understand the nature of light, for example, we need the metaphor of either "wave"" or "particle." Without a metaphor, we cannot understand the new things nor can we communicate (share) what we understand. It is because we always understand only on the basis of what we have already known.

Another example of signifying is construction of causality. Causality is a way of relating two things, too. But these "two things" are always originated from our perceiving. For example, when we see fire and smoke, we can make a causality between the two things. And for Stoics, smoke is a sign for fire. But smoke and fire become the two different things only by our perception. Just think about the problem of whether the flame also could be a sign for the fire: It, of course, depends whether we discriminate the flame from the fire. If we perceive smoke and fire as one thing, then we cannot make any relationship between them, much less causality. Threrfore, we may say while perceiving is based on "dividing" or " discriminating," signifying is on "combining" or "relating."

Lastly, the sign, which is "both a human product and an objectivation of human subjectivity" (Berger and Luckmann, 1976:35), should produce meaning for others. It is possible only by the action of "interpreting." As consumption produces utilities from commodities, "interpreting" produces meanings from signs.

Interpreting is admitting and sharing others' percepts as my own through mediation of signs. It implies that the referent of a sign is not the material object but the percept. Eco also said:

> The referent-cat is no longer a mere physical object. It has already been transformed into semiotic entity. But this methodological transformation introduces the problem of the semiotic definition of the percepta" (Eco,1976a:164).

Through this process of interpretation, others' rather individual "bodily experiences" of the world become my own.

Just as there can be various ways in consuming a commodity, a sign also can be interpreted in many ways. The ways of interpretation or "the series of codes" for interpretation are also produced by the very process of sign production. And just as consumption also produces commodity production, interpretation produces signs and the semiotic relation. Peirce said, "nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign. Interpretation, then, produces the sign" (Peirce in Greenlee,1973:99).

There could be two kinds of interpretation according to its object: Products of others (books, films, etc.) and products of the Nature (fossils, foot prints of rabits in the mountain,etc.). In either case, the process of sign production is completed only by interpreting. Interpreting the products of the Nature could be compared to gathering the natural products, say fish, as a way of commodity production.

(2) Semiosis as a triadic relation

There is a generally admitted definition of sign: Sign is "everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else" (Eco,1979:7). This definition of sign is, of course, originated from that of Peirce: "A sign is an object which stands for another to some mind" (Peirce,1991:141). As we may understand through these definitions, everything *is* a sign as long as it is engaged in the sign-relation or semiotic relation. This implies that sign itself does not create the semiotic relation; on the contrary, the semiotic relation makes something as a sign. For example, a red light itself does not produce any relation, but the semiotic relation makes the red

light as a sign. Depending on the kinds of relations, it could be a traffic sign, or a emergency sign, or a sign for advertisements.

According to Peirce, this semiotic relation is a triadic relation:

> A *representamen* is a subject of a triadic relation to a second, called its *object*, for a third, called its *interpretant*, this triadic relation being such that the *representamen* determines its interpretant to stand in the same triadic relation to the same object for some interpretant. (Peirce in Eco, 1976b:1464)

Here can we find three elements of the relation: representamen or sign, its object, and its interpretant. I suggest that we should understand "object" as "material quality" (Peirce,1991:141), "interpretant" as human action or "idea" (notion) conveyed to human mind" (Eco,1976b:1460), and sign (representamen) as something produced by the interpretant from the object, or as something combining the external object and the internal human mind. Thus, the semiotic relation is the process in which the three elements are interrelated: the material, the action and the product.

Some may ask: How could "interpretant" be the human action? Because Peirce said, "anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum" (Peirce,1991:239). Thus interpretant itself might be said as a sign. But I would argue, interpretant is not a sign at least in a sense that we have used it so far. *It is not a sign because it has no material elements.*

The starting point of this essay was the proposition that "a sign is the combination of the material and the meaning." Even though Peirce explains interpretant as "the idea produced by the sign," or "a subsequent thought" (Peirce,1991:7), but he also says, in some other places, "interpretation replaces interpretant" (Peirce in Greenlee, 1973:100). "Interpretant" is something between "the object" and "its sign," and therefore, I believe, it should be something that relates the objects and the signs. If we do not believe the internal and necessary relationships between the thing (the material property) and its meaning (This is one of the crucial arguments of Marx, and thus it

is the "good-bye" point between Marx and Peirce), only human agency can make the relations of the objects and its sign. I think, therefore, "interpretant" should be regarded as a human action (This is why I prefer "interpreting" to "interpretation"), and I agree with Peirce only when he "replaces" interpretant with interpretation.

(3) The three stages of the semiosis and the triple triangle model

The semiotic process consists of the three stages, and each of the stage consists of the triadic relation. In the first stage, "percept" is produced by the action of "perceiving" with the material of the "sense data" or external object. In the second stage, "sign" is produced by the action of "signifying" with the "percept." Lastly, "meaning" is produced by the action of "interpreting" with the sign. The actual human communication begins with the third stage of "interpreting" just as the commodity production starts from "consumption." We produce the sign for others' interpreting just as we produce the commodity for others' consumption.

Let's think about an example of a traffic sign. First, it must be perceived (seen) by the driver. Second, it must be signified as a traffic sign, not as, say, a neon-lamp for advertising. Third, it must be interpreted correctly, either "stop" or "go."

Each of these three stages is the atomic structures that consist of one molecule of the semiosis, and in the semiosis of human communication, a number of "molecules" would be connected by sharing a certain common "atomic" structures. I believe we could construct a model for "the unlimited semiosis" on the basis of this "triple triadic molecular structure." The notion of Peirce's "unlimited semiosis" could be understood that a sign is reproduced as anoher sign as a result of semiotic relation. The same is true with the commodity production. A commodity is produced only from another commodity (See Sraffa,1960), and therefore, we may say that the capitalist production process consists also of "unlimited commodity production" As it is shown in the Figure 2, the molecular structure of semiosis or the triple triangle model of sign production is exactly the same as that of commodity production.

Figure 2: The triple triangle model for the sign production

These three stages of sign production could be compared to the three categories of Peirce. The "Firstness" may be related to the first stage, because "Firstness" is based on the "qualities" or, in other words, certain percepts, for example, "certain qualities of feeling, such as the colour of magenta, the odour of attar, the sound of a railway whistle, the taste of quinine," etc. (Peirce,1956:80).

"Secondness" of Peirce may look somewhat different from the second stage. According to him, the "second category of elements of phenomena comprises the actual facts," and they are "perfectly individual" (Peirce,1956:77), while the product of the second stage is the "exchangeable percept." But there is one common thing between them: The second category of elements are clear to everybody. It can be admitted as the same thing because of its "factuality" and "actuality." And the product of the second stage is also clear to every body, otherwise it cannot be the "exchangeable percept" or the sign.

The third category of elements of phenomena consists of what we may call "thought," "general," "the law," or "general facts" (Peirce,1956:78). According to him, "thought is neither qualities nor facts": And meaning is neither percepts nor objects. Thus the product of the third stage or meaning is, I believe, comparable to Peirce's Thirdness.

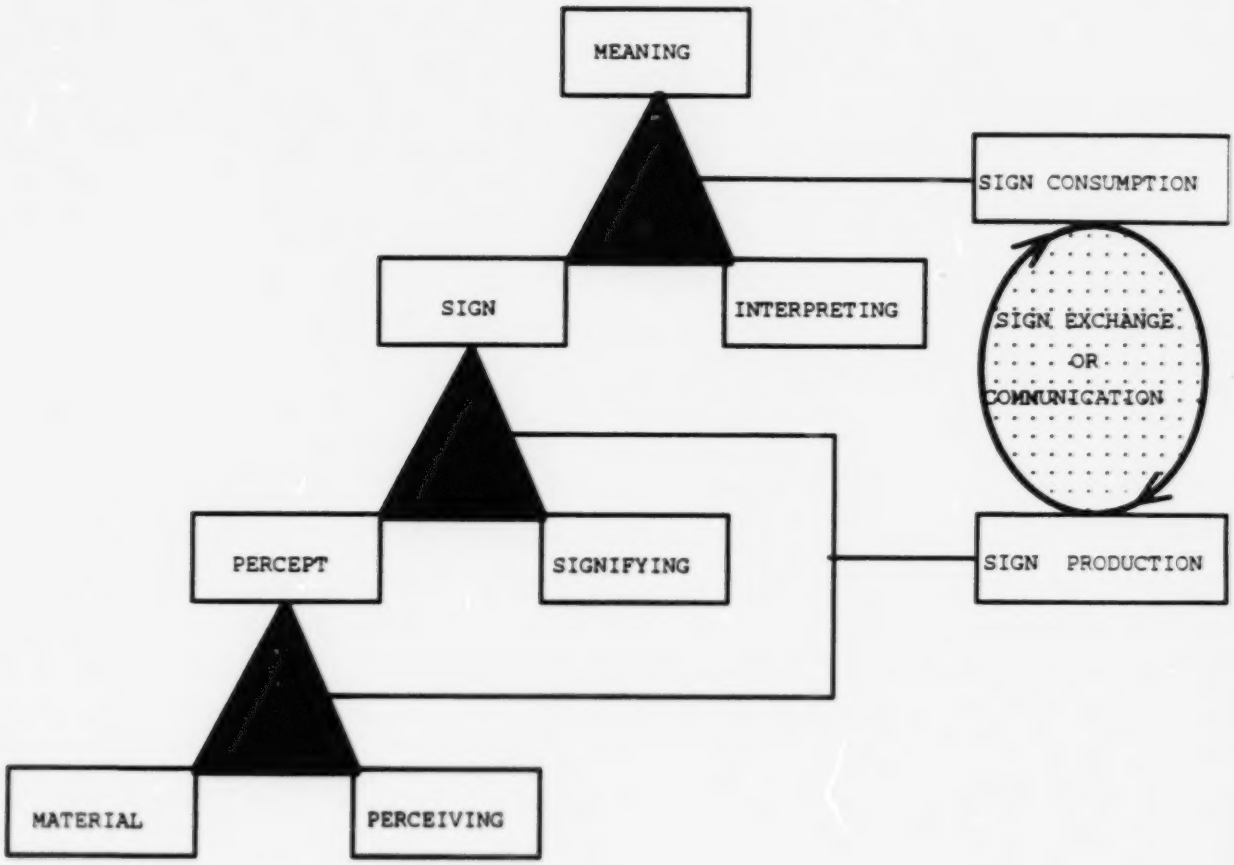

Figure 2: THE TRIPLE TRIANGLE MODEL FOR SIGN PRODUCTION

Conclusion

Human beings are always on the way of constructing (producing and reproducing) their life world by "perciving" the world, and by "signifying" what they perceived, and by "exchanging and sharing" what they signified through communication. This is the semiotic process. One of the most important processes of constructing our world is, of course, that of commodity production. Thus, we may say that the commodity production process (the economic process!) is semiosis itself. This was clearly shown through the same structure of the triple triangle model. We might be able to construct more complicated model for the actual economic processes and human communication by multiplying and connecting the molecular triple triangle structure of sign production.

Note

[1] According to Saussure, "la langue est un systeme de signes exprimant des idees et par la comparable a l'ecriture, a l'alphabet des sourds-muets, aux rites symboliques, aux formes de politesse, aux signaux militaires, etc. etc. Elle est seulement le plus important de ces systemes. On peut donc concevoir une science qui etudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale" (in Eco, 1976a:14).

[2] Unfortunately, I could not find here enough space for all these issues. I hope to have another opportunity to show how the notion of "communication labor," which is based on the proposition "a commodity is a sign," could solve the old problems of the political economy, that is, the problem of transformation, definition of productive labor, character of the class classfication, and so on.

[3] Jean Baudrillard (1989:44-45) explains it as "The fluidity of objects and needs." Besides, Sahlins (1988:132) also said, "The argument is that one cannot determine the nature of what it is produced -- which is to say the character of use-value -- simply from the nature of human needs or the fact that production satisfies them."

[4]. For example, Sinclair (1989:2) says, "for retail price advertising usually presupposes that the products have already been made known through prior advertising by manufacturers or distributors."

[5] According to *Advertising Age* (Feb. 1, 1993:1), "Time Waner's planned 'electronic superhighway' will open up unlimited opportunities for marketers as well as consumers, company executives and media industry."

[6] More examples other than Smythe: .*..buying an ad and buying an audience* (Livant,1979:94); .*..the media's job is to sell audiences to advertisers* (McQueen, in Livant 1977:97)

[7] But advertisers use not only commercials. They also use *programs* for their advertising. When we watching the sports programs in TV, we cannot but see so many advertisements on the fences of the ground and on the uniforms of the players. Even in the films, we can find the same thing: those who have seen the *Back to the Future II* may remember that the actor wore the automatic *Nike* shoes and preferred *Pepsi-Cola.*

[8] But it does not mean that I deny existence of *misleading advertising* (Harris,1983:169-73). It is not difficult to find deceptive and fraudulent advertising in our society. But they are not the productive communication labor, but *evil by-products,* just as the pollution is the evil by-product of the material production. The misleading advertising should be and can be reduced by the advertising policies and the civil movements just like in the case of the environmental pollution.

[9] Haug (1986:24-34) also regards *aesthetic monopolization of use-value ; the fight for and with names* as *the first effect and instrument of monopolization.*

[10] Regarding to this issue, Berger and Luckmann's explanation (1967:50-1) is also inspiring: *This eccentricity of man's experience of his own body has certain consequences for the analysis of human activity as conduct in the material environment and as externalization of subjective meanings.*

[11] Eco argues how cultural conditions determines our perception of the colors. He says, *perception occupies a puzzling position, somewhere midway between semiotic categorization and discrimination based upon mere sensory processes* (Eco,1985:166).

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